STREET SPIRIT

Volume 19, No. 10 October 2013 Donation: $1.00

A publication of the American Friends Service Committee

JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Young Artists Create a Vision of Beauty and Justice

by Ariel Messman-Rucker

A young girl excitedly points out the colorful wild animals in the beautiful new mural created by Youth Spirit Artworks.

Only a few months ago, the long-held dream of finding a spacious art studio in Berkeley to help increasing numbers of low-income and homeless youth explore their artistic creativity was only that — a dream.

This particular dream seemed to fly in the face of the real world, and was in danger of being grounded by the cost of real estate. Yet Youth Spirit Artworks held onto their hopes of expanding to provide arts programs and job training for the growing number of homeless youth living on the streets, trapped in at-risk neighborhoods, and attending local area high schools.

This month, in a sudden turn-around, this unlikely vision began to unexpectedly materialize in Berkeley.

The young artists and staff organizers of Youth Spirit Artworks began laying the foundations for their vision by moving into a new and bigger space on October 1 that will allow the organization to help a larger number of impoverished youth learn new skills and create beautiful artwork for the Berkeley community.

Youth Spirit Artworks (YSA) is a nonprofit job-training program that uses art to better the lives of low-income and homeless youth, ages 16-25. Youth are granted stipends to help support themselves while they move through the program, creating art and developing leadership and entrepreneurial skills.

"Our mission is to use art jobs and job training as a vehicle for empowering and transforming the lives of homeless and low-income young people," said YSA Executive Director Sally Hindman.

Now that the young artists are "graduating" into a larger and better workspace, it is hard to believe that just months ago the idea of moving into a more spacious studio was a dream that Hindman thought would have to be put on hold for the foreseeable future because of budget constraints.

It wasn't until she found a site with a reasonable rent, and then an artistically based web company stepped in and offered to sublease a portion of the space, that this dream became a reality.

Maheesh Jain, the founding president of YSA, approached Hindman with the idea of his company, 3rd Revolution, an innovative web company that showcases the work of artists, subleasing a portion of the space to offset their costs.

"The process has been truly grace-filled," Hindman said. "Everything has fallen into place super easily and simply for Youth Spirit. We are grateful to everyone involved."

The new building is located at 1740 Alcatraz Avenue, across the street from Youth Spirit Artwork's old studio, and has twice as much space and a large parking

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Artist Rodney Bell Inspires Homeless Seniors

by Terry Messman

When Rodney Bell, 57, came to St. Mary's Center in Oakland seeking shelter from the winter storms in November 2011, social worker Susan Werner remembered him as "withdrawn, depressed, hunkered down, fearful, hurting and deflated."

He seemed forlorn and drifting, and he often sat alone in a corner, without speaking to others or even making eye contact. "I saw him enshrouded in a cloak that often people wear who have felt shunned for their basic human existence," Werner said.

Many homeless people in our society have been so ground down by constant rejection and mistreatment that they can no longer believe that anyone will ever again understand or accept them. When Rodney Bell finally came to St. Mary's Center, he was distrustful about receiving any help at all because he had been emotionally scarred by past experiences of being dismissed and cast out.

"He had felt rejected when the prior shelter at which he stayed told him to leave for not having sufficient money," Werner said. "He remained dubious and guarded, and did not initiate contact with others and would recoil when asked about himself."

During his first five months at St. Mary's, he remained aloof from nearly everyone, with one exception. Werner is the facilitator of St. Mary's art programs, and she found that Bell would throw himself into the art-making projects and, in those moments, he would become enthusiastic and talkative.

Flash forward to the present day, and the transformation is immediately apparent. During a recent visit to St. Mary's Center for an interview with him, Rodney Bell is smiling broadly and talking animatedly with other seniors while he hurriedly puts the finishing touches on a painting entitled, "St. Mary's Rocks." His artworks are spread out all over the table and several more are displayed prominently on the walls of the center.

In the past year, Bell has created striking images of his experiences while homeless — artistic expressions of what it feels like to be exiled to walk the streets all day. His art has struck a common chord in many of the low-income and homeless members of St. Mary's Center.

Just as his visual art graces the walls of the center, his music fills the air. Bell studied music and art at Laney College, and he began playing the piano and singing requests every Thursday at lunch at St. Mary's. His music now brightens the day for many homeless seniors who have lived unimaginably difficult lives.

See **Inspiring Art of Rodney Bell** *page 4*

Rodney Bell plays the piano for the community at St. Mary's. Susan Werner photo

DBA's John Caner Investigated for Campaign Violations

Many of the homeless poll workers Caner hired had no idea they were assisting the Measure S Campaign, an anti-homeless measure to make sitting down a crime.

A street-sitter named Roy enjoys the sun on Shattuck Avenue. Measure S tried to outlaw the act of sitting. Carol Denney photo

by Carol Denney

John Caner, the director of the Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA) and Measure S campaign manager, acknowledged in a letter dated Sept. 19, 2013, to Berkeley's Fair Campaign Practices Commission that shortly before last year's election, he handed out more than $5,530 in $100 and $50 cash payments to more than 50 "poll workers," many of them homeless and formerly homeless clients of Options Recovery Services, to distribute misleading slate fliers near polling places.

Caner also acknowledged neglecting to report some campaign expenditures as required under Berkeley election law, which says campaign expenditures be made by check or credit card so that they can be traced.

Patricia Wall, executive director of the Homeless Action Center in Berkeley, explained that the Fair Campaign Practices Commission decided to conduct an investigation into the Yes On S campaign "because John Caner admitted to paying 52 homeless people in cash on election day to campaign against themselves."

The Fair Campaign Practices Commission unanimously voted to investigate the Measure S campaign at their meeting at the North Berkeley Senior Center on Sept. 19, 2013.

According to witnesses, many of the workers Caner hired had no idea that they were assisting the Measure S Campaign, an anti-homeless ballot initiative to make sitting down a crime. Measure S was defeated at the polls.

The slate fliers distributed by the homeless "poll workers" did not identify the literature as coming from the Measure S campaign.

"Hiring the homeless clients of a recovery program to campaign for their own criminalization is the opposite of harm reduction," said Wall in a statement criticizing the Yes On S campaign for misusing homeless poll workers. "Berkeley's vulnerable populations deserve better."

"They thought they were working for the Obama campaign," stated Zoning Board Commissioner Igor Tregub at the commission meeting, referring to the workers who sat by a large "Obama" sign handing out the inaccurate fliers. "I was quite disappointed," Tregub said, pointing out that he was a member of the Berkeley Democratic Club. Evidence suggests the Berkeley Democratic Club contributed to the Measure S campaign without complying with reporting requirements.

The Berkeley Democratic Club registered in 2010 as a "State General Purpose Committee" which commission staff interpreted as allowing it to file with the state rather than with local cities, but the Fair Campaign Practices Commission decided to investigate the issue.

Caner did not attend the packed commission meeting on September 19. Roland Peterson, the executive director of the Telegraph Avenue Business Improvement District, spoke for the Measure S campaign and dismissed the violations as "groundless." Caner's letter, distributed at the Commission meeting, claimed the $5,530 in cash payments was done because he assumed the people he was hiring would not have bank accounts.

Caner is described on the DBA's website as having "over twenty years business, non-profit, and community development experience." He serves on the board of the Aurora Theatre and Berkeley Alliance as well as the fundraising committees for the South Branch Library and Berkeley City College. Such experience would seem to make it unusual that his distribution of $5,530 in cash payments as a campaign manager could be characterized as accidental or due to inexperience.

"It's outrageous," stated Jesse Arreguin, Berkeley City Council representative for District Four, which includes the downtown area. "You're paying people to take their rights away. It's unacceptable."

Caner's letter stated that any violation was "inadvertent", and that he promised to work closely with the commission to remedy any violations.

Bob Offer-Westort, who filed the complaint along with Patricia Wall of the Homeless Action Center, stated, "What's core is the political culture that we want to have as a community. It's naïve to think that elections won't be contentious, won't be competitive. However, there is such a thing as fair debate, in which opposing parties can listen to one another and treat each other with honesty and respect."

Merchant associations across the nation typically lobby for anti-poor laws. They tend to want storefronts and public spaces to resemble what Paul Boden of the Western Regional Advocacy Project in San Francisco calls the "theme park" look: buckets of flowers, nobody looking poor or hungry so that shoppers are never forced to prioritize their spending between personal indulgence and community need.

John Caner, as the CEO of the Downtown Berkeley Association, has only its board of directors to answer to regarding the electoral violations he committed as Measure S campaign manager, which were not specifically part of his role at the DBA but which cast a shadow on his judgment and leadership capabilities.

Berkeley's business community is forced, through the downtown Business Improvement District's mandatory fees, to pay his salary, but has little input into the DBA's leadership, priorities, or organization, according to a former board member.

But the Fair Campaign Practices Commission does have jurisdiction over the complaint filed by Patricia Wall and Bob Offer-Westort, and can levy fines against the Measure S campaign manager and others if their investigation supports the complaint.

"It's just about fairness," said one street-sitter who preferred to be anonymous when I told him the news. "We're trying to play fair out here. They ought to play fair, too."

Is It Illegal to Sit on the Street and Watch the Clouds Go By

News that someone was getting a ticket for sitting on a chair playing the fiddle traveled fast up and down Telegraph.

by Carol Denney

Berkeley's last election featured a contest between anti-sitting-law proponents and those opposed to making the simple act of sitting down a crime. Measure S, the anti-sitting law, was defeated at the ballot in November 2012. It was considered a civil rights victory. But who really won?

It was the most expensive campaign in Berkeley history. The effort to outlaw sitting was funded by well-heeled real estate interests and supported by merchant associations, most of the Berkeley City Council, and the Chamber of Commerce. Criminalizing the simple act of sitting down was described by otherwise intelligent people as a humane response to human need. Since living on the streets was so hard, better to make it illegal.

So, in the aftermath of our victory over the forces that attempted to outlaw sitting, can you sit on the street and watch a cloud go by? The results are still not in.

I worked on the campaign opposing the anti-sitting law. A large part of our work was simply educational. Misleading anti-sitting law materials in expensive, shiny colors were everywhere. But once people found out the extremity of the anti-sitting law, they generally opposed it.

Most people realized that the law would most probably be used against some people but not others. It's hard to ignore the Cheeseboard pizza eaters sitting undisturbed by the "Don't Sit on the Median" signs on Shattuck in North Berkeley.

Two days before the election, on Sunday, Nov. 4, 2012, I put poetry opposed to the anti-sitting law from poets all over the Bay Area up on the fence near the corner of Haste and Telegraph and sat down with some musicians to play.

We were trying to illustrate that simply sitting on a chair playing music — perfectly legal behavior under the law — would become a crime in two days if Measure S were to pass.

I got a ticket.

Artists were inside the fence perimeter touching up the mural facing Haste Street. People trickled by, enjoying a sunny day. We sat close to the fence, so there was seven feet of unobstructed nine-feet-wide sidewalk in front of each of us, more than enough space for two wheelchairs to pass without issue. Our instrument cases were beside or under us, out of the way.

A few people stopped and asked about the "This Is Legal" sign and its significance, but our demonstration was pretty unobtrusive until Berkeley Police Officer Heather Cole rode up on her bicycle. She accused us of obstructing an empty sidewalk, and since I had carefully researched both the ordinance and the best place on Telegraph to make sure to cause no hardship for merchants or passers-by, I found it pretty funny.

This wasn't civil disobedience. This was carefully planned *obedience* to illustrate the absurd overreach of the anti-sitting proposal. I had checked the law, checked with attorneys, planned every aspect of the demonstration so that no one and no one's instruments would be jeopardized.

Officer Cole continued to threaten us, arguing that we were in the way, despite there being no complaining party. The

See **Is Sitting Still Illegal** *page 7*

Albany Plans a Mass Eviction of Homeless Campers

Albany's decision to cast the campers out would be a practical disaster and a moral outrage

For the campers, the Albany Bulb is their home, their community, their village. It is where they keep all the necessities of daily living, as well as their personal treasures — more than can fit in a shopping cart if they were to become homeless.

Amber Whitson stands between a large painting and a towering sculpture at the Albany Bulb. She had chronic health problems before she moved to the Bulb. She says, "My health has gotten better since I lived here and that is amazing to me."

Story and photos by Lydia Gans

The City of Albany's deadline for the threatened eviction of the homeless people camped at the Albany Bulb is drawing closer with no sign of relief in sight. The plan is to transfer the Bulb to the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) which does not permit overnight camping.

The eviction is scheduled to take effect in the middle of October. It would mean that about 60 people who have been living at the Bulb will be made homeless. City officials remain determined to expel all the homeless camp-dwellers, even though Albany has no homeless shelters, and no real plans to provide replacement housing for the displaced homeless people.

The Albany Bulb is located at the west end of the Albany peninsula, a former landfill for concrete and construction debris. The EBRPD is already exercising its control over the area leading up to the Albany Bulb. For the first time, there is a large East Bay Regional Park District sign at the beginning of the parking lot.

Heavy equipment has demolished the lush vegetation on the Neck and the Plateau. A notice posted there explains that the EBRPD will be working there through October to clear the area and "establish coastal grassland."

The City of Albany has failed or refused to create a single shelter bed or unit of affordable housing for homeless people in the past 20 years of dealing with a large homeless encampment at the Albany Bulb. City officials now have turned the problem over to Berkeley Food and Housing Project (BFHP), allotting $30,000 for a "Homeless Outreach and Engagement Program within the City." (While the focus of this plan is on the campers on the Bulb, homeless people throughout the city are included.)

The agreement calls for the BFHP to connect with the individual campers, assess their immediate and long-term needs, and inform them of the various resources available in the community.

As for housing, the program calls for helping people "develop plans" for finding permanent or temporary housing. Nothing is said about actually placing people in housing or finding any kind of shelter for homeless people when they are evicted.

Although BFHP has experience in finding affordable housing, there is clearly no way they could be expected to find housing for more than 60 displaced people in the immediate future. Many of the people living at the Albany Bulb have been homeless for several years, some are disabled, some have pets, and about half have no income.

BFHP workers go out to the Albany Bulb on Tuesdays and Thursdays to talk with the campers, connect them with services and take them to meet what might be a potential housing opportunity. By September, no one had been housed.

At its meeting on September 3, the Albany City Council voted to renew the contract with BFHP for another $30,000. Now, with little time left, BFHP is in a "final push" to urge campers to work out options such as reuniting with their family, or moving into some sort of transitional housing. The City of Albany, however, has utterly nothing to offer the homeless people it intends to evict.

Pressure on the campers is increasing. There is a move to enforce a nighttime curfew from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., apparently based on an ordinance covering all park property. This unfairly affects the campers since the only access to the Bulb is through the area already under EBRPD control.

Camper Amber Whitson reports that she was stopped coming home from the Target store after 10 p.m. one evening and warned that curfew violators could be taken to jail. It's not clear if others are being stopped or if the Park police are temporarily backing off.

Along with publicity about the incorporation of the Albany Bulb into the regional park system, news of the threatened eviction of the campers has been spreading. People who walk the trails, or who take their dogs for an outing, love the Bulb the way it is, and they are objecting.

For the campers, the Albany Bulb is their home, their community, their village. It is where they keep all the necessities of daily living, as well as their personal treasures — more than can fit in a shopping cart if they were to become homeless. For many of them, the Albany Bulb is a place where they can live close to nature and have the sense of freedom that is most important to them.

Louis and Sharon built themselves a wonderful shelter under a tree, with the bedroom on an upper level enveloped by the tree's branches while giving them a glorious view of the Bay. To have to give this up and end up homeless or move into a cramped shelter or slum hotel would be devastating.

Jimbow has been living at the Albany Bulb off and on since the 1990s. His home is also a free lending library — one of the popular attractions on the Bulb. Jimbow was housed at one time, but after a year he moved back out to the Bulb. He couldn't live like that, he said, when all he saw when he looked out the window were the walls of adjoining houses.

The City of Albany has failed or refused to create a single shelter bed or develop a single unit of affordable housing in the past 20 years of dealing with a large homeless encampment at the Bulb.

Amber Whitson had chronic health problems before she moved to the Bulb seven years ago. She says, "My health has gotten better since I lived here and that is amazing to me."

Five-year camper Tom has some income but says it is "not nearly enough to pay rent and leave anything else to live on." He devotes time each day to clearing away metal and the big pieces of concrete left around where people walk.

Other campers plant seeds and grow plants. They haul out their garbage and carry in their water — all with no help from the city.

The threatened eviction and the campers' plight has been getting considerable attention in the local media and is generating public sympathy. When Albany officials extended the contract with BFHP, campers and supporters held a protest march to the City Council meeting on Spetember 3. The press began to seriously pay attention.

Concerned people from the community began to get together and organize supportive actions. A group from Solano Community Church and friends went up and down Solano Avenue making chalk drawings on the sidewalks promoting the campers' message: "Share the Bulb." That message is the title of the supporters' website sharethebulb.org.

There have been community discussions and showings of Andy Kraemer's film, "Where Do You Go When It Rains." An Oakland community center held a film screening and a discussion of the issues, and a sociology class at U.C. Berkeley will hold a panel discussion on the topic.

On Saturday, September 28, a community Gathering to Defend the Albany Bulb at the main entry to the park was organized. There was a potluck supper amply supplied by Food Not Bombs, Occupy Oakland and other groups, followed by a lively discussion session. On Tuesday, October 2, a Solidarity Campout at the Bulb is planned.

Still, Albany officials are not relenting in their determination to cast the campers out, even though it would be a practical disaster as well as a moral outrage.

Only one person has found housing. For the others, this mass expulsion will mean a succession of temporary shelters or life on the streets. Even for those with some income, anything affordable is likely to be small and dark and not necessarily safe.

All this doesn't have to happen. There are alternatives. It is good to remember Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for their health and well being ... including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services..."

Street Spirit

Street Spirit is published by **American Friends Service Committee.** The vendor program is run by **J.C. Orton.**

Editor, Layout: Terry Messman
Web designer: Ariel Messman-Rucker

Contributors: Claire J. Baker, Rodney Bell, Carol Denney, Lydia Gans, Sally Hindman, Ariel Messman-Rucker, S.F. Print Collective, Susan Werner, George Wynn, Youth Spirit Artworks

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Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, poems, photos and art.
***Contact*: Terry Messman**
Street Spirit, 65 Ninth Street,
San Francisco, CA 94103
***E-mail*: spirit@afsc.org**
***Web:* http://www.thestreetspirit.org**

If you have questions about the *Street Spirit* vendor program, please call J.C. Orton, the coordinator, on his cell phone at (510) 684-1892 or e-mail him at noscw@sbcglobal.net.

The Inspiring Art and Music of Rodney Bell

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Werner said, "He delights in playing songs other seniors request to hear. He sings along, voicing an inner joy, and the fluid piano melodies he plays offer the balm of peacefulness."

Asked what musicians he loves most, Bell immediately cited Nat King Cole, the renowned jazz pianist and singer with the smooth, immediately recognizable baritone who sang such popular classics as "Stardust," "Unforgettable," "A Blossom Fell," "Mona Lisa" and "Nature Boy."

Cole was the first African American to host a television program, "The Nat King Cole Show," on NBC in 1956. He paid a price for breaking racial boundaries and had to fight racism throughout his life. In 1948, the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross on the front lawn of his new home in Los Angeles. During a 1956 concert in Birmingham, Alabama, Cole was assaulted on stage by three members of the North Alabama Citizens Council. He later helped plan the March on Washington in 1963.

Bell is deeply drawn to Cole's music, but he is also inspired by his personal example of creating beauty for the world even in the face of his own hardships.

"I love Nat King Cole because in spite of adversity in his time, he was still able to pass on to us such a richness in music and entertainment," he said. "I just loved him because his spirit survived and shone through all the adversity of the times he went though and he still was able to give us such rich music."

Those words are revealing, because if they're read as a description of Rodney Bell himself, they shine a light on how his spirit has overcome adversity in order to create beautiful art and music for others.

Asked if he has tried to emulate Cole's example, Bell said, "Rising above adversity is so important — still doing good things and giving 100 percent, still loving in spite of hate. Love is nurturing, and when you're blessed with creative gifts, you need to have love for what you do, love for the people you perform for and love for yourself."

Bell loves Cole's music to such an extent that he strives to "channel" his voice. Cole had a simultaneously smooth and grainy voice, and when I asked Bell how anyone could impersonate such a distinctive and unusual vocal sound, he sang, rather than spoke, his explanation.

Without a moment of rehearsal, Bell sat down at the piano and — by memory, and with no sheet music — sang one song after another out of the Nat King Cole songbook, resurrecting the beautiful music of a man who died in 1965 when Bell was still a boy. He recaptured the spirit of these songs in a voice that was uncannily similar to Cole's vocal phrasing: "Ramblin' Rose," "Too Young," and "Route 66."

Nature Boy

When I told him my favorite Cole song was "Nature Boy," and began explaining that the song was written by a "premature hippie" who somehow wrote an anthem for the Summer of Love way back in 1947, Bell nodded knowingly and said, "Yes, Eden Ahbez. He even had sandals and a robe and a message from above."

Ahbez was a long-haired songwriter who wrote about "a very wise and gentle boy" who wandered "very far, very far, over land and sea." "Nature Boy" revealed the secret at the very heart of human existence.

In his Cole-influenced vocal style, Bell brought the song beautifully to life with a mesmerizing performance of the subtle, memorable melody. The song concludes by expressing life's ultimate lesson:

"While we talked of many things
Fools and kings,
This he said to me:
The greatest thing you'll ever learn
Is just to love, and be loved in return."

Bell captured Nat King Cole's vocal inflections and phrasing so well, I broke out in spontaneous applause. Then he kept playing "Ramblin' Rose," "The Very Thought of You," and other selections from his hero's songbook.

The Indestructible Spirit

Susan Werner described how Rodney Bell's thoughtful artworks and peace-filled music somehow were born out of his soul-scarring experiences on the street.

"In spite of enduring life's hardships, heartbreaks and feeling utterly hopeless at times about the injustices, Rodney is not defined by his circumstances," Werner said. "He shows in his art tremendous passion that lets the indestructible spirit through. It's the place that he creates from — the indestructible spirit."

In the same way, the brilliant artistry of the greatest blues musicians grew out of the worst oppression, racial discrimination and poverty. Blues master John Lee Hooker once said that the greatest music grew out of Mississippi "because it's the worst state." Homelessness may now be the worst "state" in the land. Just as blues musicians found a way to rise above the hardships of the Mississippi Delta, people that end up in a shelter in Oakland after suffering the most traumatic blows sometimes overcome all the odds and create art of great beauty.

"St. Mary's Rocks" Art by Rodney Bell

"Waiting" Art by Rodney Bell

"Father If It Be Thy Will" Art by Rodney Bell

There is a mystery at the heart of homelessness and poverty that defies our expectations, and seems to fly in the face of all logic. Suddenly, inexplicably, beauty arises out of the ugliest circumstances, and kindness and humanity are found in abundance in the very people forced to endure the worst kinds of persecution and hostility.

It is a mistake to ever romanticize the horrible social calamity of homelessness, of course. Too often, the mean streets take their toll and brutalize their victims, forcing human beings to live in a subhuman environment where they must sometimes do whatever it takes to survive in a world bereft of help and hope.

Yet, the mystery of beauty persists in emerging from these same dead-end streets that should destroy people and shut down their dreams permanently. At unpredictable moments, in the most unlikely places, wings are unfurled. In the very midst of overcrowded shelters and savage streets and jail cells and slum hotels — wings. Someone finds their wings and rises above it all.

Amazing Grapes

I mentioned to Bell that just as his art had grown out of homeless shelters, one of the most important and lasting art forms in the world — the blues — had arisen out of the same conditions of injustice and oppression. He replied (or so I thought): "It's like *grace*."

"Yes, it's like grace!" I said, excited to hear that this artist who had overcome homelessness to create beauty for others, would confirm my own spiritual outlook about the mysterious workings of grace.

But I had misheard him, at perhaps the most important moment of the interview. My lousy hearing strikes again.

"Not grace," he corrected. "I said it's like *grapes*."

Somewhat deflated, I involuntarily thought how the classic spiritual would sound with this revision: "Amazing *grapes*, how sweet the sound."

But, even though I'd been misled by my faulty hearing, Bell went on to describe the same dynamic that the song "Amazing Grace" reveals.

"It's like grapes," he repeated. "You have to squeeze grapes, trample them down, to get the wine. It's being in oppression or hard situations that sort of wrung art out of me. It's just this condition of homelessness that gets me to produce art, which is what I'm doing."

Music is like Medicine

It can be a very weighty responsibility to try to lift spirits by playing music for seniors at St. Mary's, because many have been left destitute and stranded on the streets for years on end, and have suffered hunger, loneliness, abandonment, illness and anguish.

Earlier on the day of our interview, Susan Werner observed Rodney Bell play a Sam Cooke song for Jerry Curry, a senior at the center. "Usually, this person has very downcast eyes," Werner said. But when Bell played his song request, she said, "all of a sudden he was singing and he just said, 'I just feel so full and so real and it feels good.' Rodney offers sunshine and love to St. Mary's community and lights up the room and everyone assembled whenever he plays music."

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The Inspiring Art and Music of Rodney Bell

from page 4

In Werner's view, born of years of experience in working with homeless seniors, Bell's ability to uplift people and "bring joy to our hearts" through his music comes from a paradoxical source — his experience of life's worst moments. "I actually don't think you can serve people the way that he does unless you've experienced the heartbreak, the unutterable helplessness," she said.

"When you know it in your soul, when you know how incredibly painful and demeaning life has been, I feel like you can bring the spirit that uplifts people through the music because you know how down people are."

Music is like medicine, Bell believes. "It's meaningful for me to play the piano here," he said, "because it's like a medicine. Physician heal thyself. I've always used music as a therapy to calm me down, comfort me, soothe me and I've found it works for others. It's very therapeutic."

Beyond the beauty of the melodies, the lyrics of the songs he sings give voice to the community's shared values. "The seniors here love the old way of living when people were more respectful of each other," he explained.

"And the music speaks to and nurtures those themes — respect yourself and others, keep your head up and smile, even in hard times. So I would gravitate to the message in the lyrical content, and when I play these songs at St. Mary's, the seniors here can really relate to them."

The Art of Exile

Over the past year, Bell has created several artworks that depict the struggles of homeless people to survive, to last through just one more night, to endure one more winter on the streets. The art of exile.

When Bell was homeless last year, he began living at St. Mary's winter shelter, and through working with art facilitator Susan Werner, another door was opened — the door to his own artistic potential.

"Under Susan Werner's tutelage, as therapy, instead of stressing about my homeless condition, I decided to draw and express what I was feeling about how homeless persons are rejected in the community," Bell said.

"Everyone is one paycheck or one single footstep away from being homeless. No one is exempt. I never envisioned that I would ever end up homeless. I wasn't prepared for it, and then one day I looked up, and I was homeless."

When he looked with the perspective of an artist at his own experience in living on the streets, he realized how important it was to use his art to make the public aware of the terrible hardships faced by people without homes.

"I decided to create art about what I'm experiencing in my condition of being homeless," he said. "Instead of drawing affluent people eating a fine meal, I'd draw someone eating out of a garbage can in the park. Instead of drawing someone in a nice car, I'd draw someone with a shopping cart. My focus changed because I saw another world here. It's what happened to those who used to have, but now they don't have. You go from have to have-not."

"Shopping Cart: Homeless Man's Wheels"

Asked why he chose a shopping cart as the very first image of homelessness he created, Bell replied: "The thing that struck me about that image is the fact that these carts were created for you to carry food and things when you go shopping, and have now become a symbol of homeless people who don't have any of these things. I think that's powerful."

Ironically, the very emblem of consumerism has now become a stark image of poverty. Yet homeless people are not deemed worthy to even have a shopping cart to carry their meager belongings.

"They have no places to stay, no places to sleep, no place to relieve themselves, no place to sit and get out of the elements and the weather," he said. "I began to experience all of that for myself just last year. After going through all that, I thought, 'Now I know what homeless people feel like. I'm going to start drawing what I see.' So I saw a man pushing a shopping cart. I drew the cart, and that led to all my other pictures."

"Homelessness Has Faces"

Bell's next artwork, "Homelessness Has Faces," was so well-received that St. Mary's Center used his image on the cover of their 2011-12 annual report. His painting is an attempt to humanize an entire invisible nation of destitute people who are cast out of society and ignored as nameless and faceless.

This artwork grew out of his dehumanizing experiences prior to coming to Oakland, when he lived in a Salvation Army night shelter in Tennessee.

"In Tennessee, they were more concerned about your income than about you as a person," Bell said. "If you didn't have enough money, you were not referred to certain agencies, and if you didn't have $50 a week, then after a week or two or three, they got rid of you — whether it was summer or winter. But I said, even if a person doesn't have the money, they have a *face*."

"Homelessness Has Faces" Art by Rodney Bell

"Rhythm, Harmony and Melody" Art by Rodney Bell

St. Mary's Center believed in his artistic statement that homeless people are not anonymous, but have faces, worth and human dignity, Bell said.

" People here began to realize that service agencies were becoming more concerned about dollars instead of persons. So when St. Mary's opened their shelter they sought to change all that — to be more concerned about the person, the well-being of the person. That's what grabbed me about St. Mary's."

"Mentally Ill is Homelessness"

His next major image was entitled "Mentally Ill Is Homelessness: Believe It." He created this piece to expose society's shameful mistreatment of homeless people with mental health issues. In his caption, he wrote: "In most metropolitan cities, veterans and mentally stressed persons are not able to afford housing or to obtain a home due to mental challenges."

Werner saw this work as a breakthrough for the artist. "What I remember is the breakthrough for Rodney about making visible the anguish of being homeless and what it's like to feel like an outsider to society and life itself," she said. "And the way he broke through and shared it in the group, accepting himself that he'd had this experience, I felt this incredible joy for Rodney as a human being, knowing how art allowed him to show this experience for the first time that could free him."

"Waiting"

Bell drew a timeless image of the endless waiting that consumes the lives of many homeless people — waiting in line for hours for the next meal, waiting for housing in an endless line, waiting for medical care, waiting for a job interview, waiting for justice and deliverance.

"I was at the Greyhound bus station in Oakland," Bell said, "and those particular tables are across the street from the bus station in a little park. The man took a nap at the park, so I took the liberty of sketching him while he was there in between his appointments as he was waiting."

Werner said, "I like 'Waiting' because I feel it really shows the feelings Rodney held about his situation of being left in limbo, just suspended. I could really feel how the body feels crumpled by life, until it's hard to hold oneself up. It's Rodney's direct understanding of the conditions that people face when they're at work and they feel so tired and exhausted. So many people who are homeless are incessantly thinking, 'I have to do this, I have to do that.' They keep running and racing after this thing and the futility and the hopelessness of just waiting is exhausting."

"Mentally Ill Is Homelessness" Art by Rodney Bell

"The Conference Center" Art by Rodney Bell

"Father If It Be Thy Will"

At the same park where he drew "Waiting," Bell created a self-portrait of his conversion — a turning point when he was thinking about all his homeless episodes.

"I was wondering what to do next, and it felt like a conversion experience," he said. His art depicts a homeless man waiting in the park, his shopping cart nearby, when he is bathed and transformed in spiritual light.

"It's such a depressing time in the world we live in today," he explained. "With the problems that are out there, you're going to have to tap something within, some creative juices, to where you won't be a slave to what's created by the media, but be a creator yourself, literally in your heavenly Father's image. Those who believe in a Creator, we are his creations. We are made in His image and likeness, so we have the ability to produce and create as well."

Bell's moving caption to this image is the prayer of a homeless everyman:

In a predicament
praying for a change . . .
Knowing there's gotta be a brighter day.
Asking, when is it gonna be
the light brighter than me?
And suddenly, this brilliant light,
exactly timed. Bam!

"St. Mary's Rocks"

Being at St. Mary's has given him more than shelter and food. It has meant being part of a community and getting more deeply involved in his art and music.

"St. Mary's has been very good for me," he said. "So I wanted to show my gratitude for them having the veteran's program, helping me get housing, and talking to me like a human being. So for all those things, they rock!"

People are entering a gate called "the wellness gate" that leads into St. Mary's Center. Bell said, "I wanted to symbolically show that St. Mary's is the place, and I depicted it as a mountain where all roads lead to St. Mary's."

"The Conference Center"

This stark drawing of stumps where homeless people have a streetside "conference center" was done at the mini-park in Oakland on 34th Street between Telegraph and Martin Luther King. Werner had suggested to Bell that he use his art to make statements about where people sleep, eat and sit on the streets.

"I decided I would make that a picture of the conference center, the meeting place in the park, where the only place you have to sit on is stumps," he said.

"Rhythm, Harmony and Melody"

This is a self-portrait of Bell's musical spirit. He wrote: "The music of the ancestors speaks to me to restore music to its purity. The color blue represents Rhythm; the color purple represents Harmony, and the color red represents Melody: the three-fold structure of music."

Werner said that this image shows that, "Rodney absolutely knows his purpose to bring forth his gift, his talent. No matter how he has been feeling rejected or unrecognized, he knows who he is through the music and he knows what his gifts are. His purpose is to just hone his talents as a human being for the good for all. So when God looks at his life circumstance, it just shows us that blazing spirit of being just who he is, alive and well and special."

Young Artists Create a Vision of Beauty

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lot. Acquiring a bigger studio not only allows YSA to expand the type of artwork they can create, but also means they now have the space necessary to take more underprivileged youth into their program.

"We will have a ton more space for youth to use when they make art and we will be able to diversify the artistic mediums we can pursue, like adding silk screening," Hindman said.

YSA was recently awarded a $50,000 grant by the Berkeley City Council to enable them to increase the number of youth who can be a part of their program each year. Now that they have a bigger space to accommodate more students, everything is falling into place for an organization that has been helping underprivileged and street youth in the Bay Area since 2007.

In order to receive the grant from the city, Youth Spirit Artworks joined forces with Berkeley's 2020 Vision program, which is a community-wide effort to put an end to academic achievement disparities between different races, ethnicities and income levels in Berkeley.

As part of 2020 Vision, YSA will use the increase in funds to take more homeless and low-income youth into their program, specifically from Berkeley High School and Berkeley Technical Academy, and increase their involvement with the McKinney-Vento support staff within those schools. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was one of the first federal programs to provide money for programs supporting homeless people on a nationwide level.

"It worked out great," Hindman said. "It fulfilled the goal that [Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates] had to work on closing the achievement gap and then, for us, it allowed us to build staffing into our budget that we really need for being successful."

YSA is planning to hire a half-time program coordinator/youth advocate to help better serve the high school students coming into YSA from the 2020 Vision program, but the position is one Hindman has wanted to hire for a long time because it will add an extra layer of support for the youth in her program.

Not much else within Youth Spirit Artworks will need to change to accommodate the new students because the program is already equipped to handle the needs of young people who are dealing with poverty and may be struggling in school, she said.

Once a young person starts at YSA, they go through an orientation and training program, then senior artist Victor Mavedzenge teaches ongoing art classes that they participate in. Each YSA artist begins as an aspirant and, as they reach their goals, they graduate to the next rung on the progression ladder until they become a junior artist, a position that comes with much more responsibility.

Each junior artist becomes a mentor to an aspirant, something the young people at YSA take very seriously. Not only do the mentors help their aspirant set and reach their goals within the program, but they become a friend and source of support within the YSA community.

"I like the fact that I have people who can trust me with their information and feel that I am trustworthy enough for them to let me into their lives, help them with their issues and help them prosper and go forward with their life — I like that," said Toryanna Finley, a junior artist who has mentored multiple aspirants during her time at YSA.

Esperanza Bey, a 17-year-old aspirant who joined YSA earlier this year, has benefited greatly from the one-on-one guidance and support she has gotten from her peer mentor.

"It was really good," Bey said, "especially in the beginning when I first moved out here, they were asking me all these question to see where I am. They get really involved, help you open up and it's really confidential. It's like having an extra person watch over you. It especially helps with people who don't have like an older brother or older sister to talk to."

The young artists not only learn practical vocational skills through the use of the commercial arts and money management training while they're at YSA, but they are also given the opportunity to grow as individuals and become part of a loving and supportive community that models healthy behaviors and choices.

"YSA is a safe space where youth can practice being in a healthy environment when they haven't been in that kind of environment previously and practice reconciling when there are conflicts and using nonviolent communication and being in a loving community, like a healthy family would be," Hindman said.

The youth in YSA take great pride in the work that they create, such as unique paintings on tote bags, T-shirts, candles and mugs which are then sold to the public. Fifty percent of the profits go back into the program and the rest goes directly to the young artists.

"At all of those different points on the progression ladder, they make more money and they have more responsibility levels," Hindman said. "By the time you become junior artists, you're making what would be the equivalent of minimum wage as a stipend, and all along the progression ladder, everybody gets to keep a portion of the proceeds of everything that they sell."

Creating artwork is a great way for young people to express themselves and work out the emotional and social issues they are battling, she said. Each student has a unique perspective often not seen or recognized by society. Selling beautiful works of art is a great way to bridge that gap and open the eyes of people who may disregard or avoid homeless youth otherwise.

"It's such a vehicle for healing that it's just perfect that they be involved in making art," Hindman said. "Also, it really is a way of making their voices heard so that they can say the things that they want to say as youth. That's really central to what we're doing. The world needs to know what they are experiencing and what they are feeling and what it's like being them. So they are communicating a message about who youth are and what youth are going through."

The youth sell their artwork from the storefront at their studio on Alcatraz Avenue, at farmers markets, in front of the Berkeley Bowl, and at other places around town, often using the bicycle-driven "art cart" they unveiled this past summer. They also sell art at community events and at monthly poetry slams where young artists perform their poetry live.

"I'm in charge of sales," junior artist Omar Bagent said. "So I make sure I go out to sales every day and I make sure that everybody sells. I manage the sales team and make sure we go out to the Berkeley Bowl or the farmer's market four days a week, Monday through Thursday."

Bagent, 18, who wasn't very interested in art when a friend referred him to YSA close to a year ago, has discovered he is passionate about graphic design and now plans to pursue it as a career. As a double junior artist, Bagent works at YSA for three hours, six times a week, and the money he has earned has allowed him to save for his future and purchase a laptop computer that he is using to learn graphic design.

"If you would never have come to Youth Spirit Artworks, you would have probably not found out that that's what you're good at and that's what you like," Bagent said. "We're basically a stepping stone for the future."

The organization also works on bigger art projects around the Bay Area that teach the youth new skills and push them to reach out to their community. On September 28, YSA unveiled their newest mural, titled "*Agua Es Vida*" which was painted on a building at the corner of Sacramento and Alcatraz near their studio. And they have plans to paint two murals on the outside of their new building.

The "*Agua Es Vida*" mural is an extraordinarily beautiful artwork that shows the ecological connections of life on planet Earth. A mermaid embraces a dolphin under the watchful eyes of elephants and bears. Hummingbirds, zebras, giraffes and black panthers all display the wondrous life-force of wild nature, and the brilliant colors help beautify the drab gray street.

The young artists are also starting to

See **Young Artists Create a Vision** *page 7*

Adonis Pollard, an artist with Youth Spirit Artworks, works on a painting at the YSA art studio. Photo by YSA

Members of Youth Spirit Artworks show off the bicycle-driven "art cart" they use to display their artworks. Photo by YSA

Young artists take workshops in tile-making at the Youth Spirit Artworks studio in preparation for large community art projects. Photos by Ariel Messman-Rucker

Young Artists Create A Vision of Beauty

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lead tile-making workshops in and around Berkeley so that the public can get involved in creating their next piece of large-scale community artwork.

These ceramic tiles will be used to create two large, arched, mosaic-tile signs which will be installed at two different intersections near Malcolm X Elementary School to help make the crosswalks safer, a project they decided to take on after an YSA youth's sister was injured when she was hit by a car while leaving school.

Taking part in creating bigger, community-driven art projects teaches the youth to take pride in making their neighborhoods better places to live. In addition, YSA does a lot of local social justice work which shows the youth that they have the power to make changes by getting involved and becoming leaders.

"[Youth Spirit Artworks] is a really great community and it's also really involved in doing social justice work," Hindman said. "So youth have a leadership role in all kinds of organizing activities that they get involved with — that *they* decide to get involved with — and then decide how to participate in."

Last year, Youth Spirit Artworks was heavily involved in fighting against Measure S, the anti-homeless ordinance which was defeated by Berkeley voters, thanks to the work of groups like YSA.

In 2012, the youth created a tile mural as a way to educate the public about the severe health disparity between low-income and wealthy residents in Berkeley. And now the young artists have decided that they want to join the Western Regional Advocacy Project, an alliance of West Coast homeless organizing groups that work together to fight against the civil rights abuses of people experiencing homelessness and poverty.

The young people at YSA are uniquely equipped to work on these issues because they themselves have dealt with varying degrees of poverty and homelessness.

Hindman says most of the youth in her program are struggling with finding housing and many of them survive by couch surfing, constantly moving from one place to the next. "Housing is just this huge, horrible, horrible crisis and so our youth are generally really in a horrible crisis of housing," she said. "It's just awful and has a really big impact."

Young artists created these colorful candles and sell them to the public.

For many, their housing situation is very tenuous and every winter Hindman finds herself having to drive her young artists to YEAH, a seasonal homeless shelter for youth in the Bay Area.

You can hear the frustration and desperation in Hindman's voice as she explains the problems facing youth in need of a place to live. "They are just in really, really dire straits and we have a really hard time figuring out how to help them with that because there is nothing to say, there is nothing we can do," she said. "It just makes me completely crazy."

But she is ever optimistic that her program and others like it are helping these young people who society has ignored get support and a healthy footing in life.

"A huge percentage of the population in the East Bay, especially youth, are struggling with unemployment and poverty and homelessness and so this is an opportunity for really building up your experience, building up your work experience, learning how to work, really getting your act together with your resume and all of that to really go to the next level in terms of what you want to do," she said.

Is Sitting Still Illegal in Berkeley?

from page 2

muralists were amazed. News that someone was getting a ticket for sitting on a chair playing the fiddle traveled fast up and down Telegraph. A reporter snapped pictures for the local paper. A Channel Two news crew began filming.

Officer Cole kept insisting that other people had no right to be on the sidewalk, either. She moved a nearby plein air painter to the curbside and hassled a guy about 20 feet away collecting signatures.

I had heard about this police harassment from friends on the street and people who worked at the Homeless Action Center and the East Bay Community Law Center, but it never occurred to me that an obviously political demonstration would be targeted, especially with Channel Two News cameras running.

We kept playing. Officer Heather Cole kept shouting, "I'll take you to jail if you don't stop playing," while we played "Soldier's Joy," a moment which made the news that night.

But it was turning into a strange scene. People were shouting at the cops. Two attorneys showed up who tried to explain to Officer Cole that she was misapplying the law. Cole's supervisor showed up and argued with them. I finally said, fine, give me a ticket, hoping to get back to playing.

But our effort to illustrate legal behavior was in ruins. I still don't know what Officer Cole's problem was that day. Alameda County District Attorney Nancy O'Malley dropped the case against me after a couple of court dates.

I filed a complaint with the Police Review Commission which was not sustained. So the question remains: Can you sit on the sidewalk? The law is pretty clear about it, but no one else seems to be.

A couple of the police review commissioners asked questions which implied that someone could be accused of obstructing the space one occupies with one's body, a patent absurdity which, if true, would put us all in jail.

You can't accidentally block a sidewalk under Berkeley law, as written and clarified by former Police Chief Meisner's memos. The law makes it clear that people can't be accused of blocking a sidewalk for just being there, or for having a backpack or other personal items beside them.

But the police either don't realize that or realize it and don't care what the law actually says or what it was intended to do. The Police Review Commission, the Police Department, and the City Council all look the other way as people continue to get these absurd tickets which, at some point, if not addressed, turn into jail time and court costs for which the public picks up the bill.

My ticket cost me at least three days of work, about ten cumulative hours of police officers' time, both in and out of court, court time for several pre-trial dates, and baffled a boatload of reporters, students, and Channel Two News watchers who are probably as confused as I am about why Berkeley would conduct the most expensive campaign in its history against sitting down if it is already against the law.

Is sitting down against the law? Maybe it depends on who you are. The Cheeseboard pizza-eaters obviously get a pass. Maybe it depends on whether or not you are demonstrating against something like Measure S, a kind of content-based provision. Or maybe Officer Heather Cole hates traditional old-time music, a kind of fiddle-based objection.

***Spirit of Telegraph Avenue* mural at Telegraph and Haste now depicts Carol Denney.**

It's an Alice in Wonderland world up there on Telegraph Avenue. The hookah-smoking caterpillar can't figure it out, and neither can I. The muralists painted me into the mural after that day, for which, I suppose, I should thank Officer Cole.

The Box of Memories

Miles seemed so alone with his conscience. Once he blurted out, "There's no sunshine in my life." Then he sighed, "I wish I had never seen Vietnam."

Short Story by George Wynn

Last night, a well-dressed lady with glasses cleaned out his studio apartment down the hall. I had only known Miles for two months. Too bad about him overdosing on Oxycontin. He seemed like a decent guy.

We were friends. We were both fair-skinned and of medium height, except that he was solid muscle and a year younger than I. And I had a head of salt and pepper while he had a lot of dishwater-blond hair.

I had just retired from the post office as a mail carrier. Most people in this downtown senior building keep to themselves. A couple of mean ones formed a clique to say negative stuff about other tenants.

Miles and I had a strange bond: I was a conscientious objector and he was a Special Forces guy — Army Ranger, I believe. He took some shrapnel in Vietnam and walked with a limp. The pain was getting worse but he rarely grumbled about it.

After the war, Miles became a wandering man for years on end, spending time in homeless shelters and veterans centers up and down the East Coast. He said he couldn't adjust to civilian life. Landing out west after endless years and reams of paperwork, he finally escaped the shelter system by getting into this San Francisco building on a physical disability.

Me, I did two years of community service back east as a conscientious objector, setting up an alternative school for Puerto Rican and Dominican children and teaching their parents English in the evening.

My old man had spent three years in prison during World War ll. It must run in the blood. He instilled in me from an early age the idea of opposing any institution that espouses violence.

It hurt Miles when he overheard one of the mean tenants, a woman, say, "He comes from the world of filth. What's he doing here? He should go back to those filthy streets he escaped from. Will you look at those unwashed jeans and the holes in his shoes? Oh my, long hair past his shoulders. One of them druggie hippies!"

He had a cigar box decorated with sea shells that really caught my eye on the glass table in his living room. I loved that cedar wood box. It had an earthy smell, not a city smell, rather a heady nature smell.

It was late afternoon and I was sitting drinking tea and eating rice cakes when I heard the knock on the door. I opened the door and saw a petite brunette around fifty. It was the lady who cleaned out Miles' room. "I want to give you something," she said and handed me a bag.

I opened it — it was the cigar box.

"I want you to have it," she said. "Everything in it is just as he left it. I found a note in it that said you were the only friend he had in the building and you really liked the cigar box. I'd be pleased if you maintained his memory with this gift."

"I certainly will," I said. "It's a wonderful gift." I pulled out a chair, and said, "Please sit down."

"I really have to be going."

"Please," I said, with pleading and determined eyes.

"Okay," she said and sat down.

"I'm a plain guy. Can I offer you tea and rice cakes?"

"Of course," she smiled. "I'm a plain woman."

"Oh no, you seem quite elegant."

"Thank you," she said with a gentle smile as I grabbed a cup from my tiny kitchen and set a plate of rice cakes and poured tea. "Did he ever mention me?"

"You must be Margie," I said. "He said he only had one sister."

"Yes."

"One afternoon me and him went trout fishing out at Lake Merced and he said he taught his sister to fish out here."

"That's a fine memory," she smiled.

"He said that, after a few trips, Margie caught more trout than he did."

She laughed.

"He said you were the only one who ever stuck up for him — he being the black sheep of the f-amily."

"He had his moments when he could be sweet," she mused, twisting some strands of her hair. Abruptly she stood up and said, "I really have to be going. My flight to Phoenix leaves in a few hours. The whole family lives there now."

I opened the door and watched her walk down the hall to the elevator. She turned and waved saying, "Thanks again, Vito." There was a slight smile on her pink lips and a tear or two in her eye.

I remembered that night I got off the elevator and was greeted by the sight of five and ten dollar bills and quarters strewn on the floor in front of my apartment door. He lay there moaning, hand extended toward a brown cane a few feet away.

"Let me help you up," I had said.

"Thanks buddy," he slurred. "My room's to the right. Here's my key."

I opened his door.

"Why didn't you take my money?" he said, slouching down in a sofa chair by the door.

"It's not mine."

"I congratulate the last honest man," he said, tapping the armrest. "I owe you."

"You owe yourself," I replied.

"What?"

"To take better care of yourself."

"What's your name?"

"Vito."

"I'll be seeing you. Name's Miles."

And he was true to his word. He would wait for me in the lobby almost every morning, *Chronicle* in hand, with a troubled look that would not let up even when he was joking. That first day, I walked into the lobby. He stretched out his cane and declared, "Vito I'm taking you to breakfast. Accept my invite. I ain't taking no for an answer."

What could I say except, "Let's go."

We walked past Tenderloin homeless streets and past Union Square world-class hotels, then turned up Grant Avenue to a crackerbox Chinatown eatery that served damn good bacon and eggs and home fries, just like my old man used to stir up when I was a kid.

Our Chinatown breakfast jaunt would become part of our morning ritual. We'd continue walking down towards the water, usually sitting for an hour or two at Aquatic Park, just relaxing and taking in the fresh San Francisco Bay air while staring out at the boats and freighters.

Miles never put me down for being a C.O., unlike my high school friends back in South Jersey who were in the service. They'd say things like, "You were damn lucky you were a draft resister." Or, "Remember Petey and Johnny in Print Shop? Well, they didn't make it." And I'd feel guilty for days on end.

Miles just said, "We all face situations in life in our own way."

Miles seemed so alone with his conscience. One afternoon he blurted out, "There's no sunshine in my life." Then he sighed, "I wish I had never seen Vietnam. I did some bad stuff."

"You can't live yesterday today Miles," I told him. "Life's too short."

"I don't live in your world. I live in my head." Whatever he was feeling, I could see by the tense veins in his neck that his psychological reality wasn't bearable. "I've had insomnia since I returned from 'Nam." He slightly shook his head. "I've felt more dead than alive."

Suddenly a slight smile appeared on his face. "Remember last week when we took in the Legion of Honor Museum?"

"Yeah, sure do," I said. "Love those Impressionistic paintings."

"Well, I saw a Chagall painting and for a few days, I never slept so well in years. It was as if I was inside that painting, floating in the clouds with the angels in perfect bliss."

One day, we were walking down Bay Street near Trader Joe's and Miles pointed to a building. "That's where Cost Plus used to be," he said. "My first job when I was at Galileo High School was there as a wrapper. I'd take out Asian statues to people. Then I lied about my age and saw the real Asia with a gun in my hand."

Miles avoided Fisherman's Wharf. He preferred to stroll around Fort Mason and Crissy Field. "Fisherman's Wharf is one damn tourist trap reeking of rampant consumerism," he said.

In the afternoon, we'd get a burger and fries and sit in the stands at Aquatic Park, then walk out on the pier. He'd often say how he missed the old San Francisco, like the old-timers — the Filipinos — who used to love to fish out here.

While reliving these memories, I opened the cigar box Miles had left and found a small brown leather journal with blue lined paper. One of the middle entries caught my eye:

"Before I met Vito, I'd sit in coffee shops by myself reading the Sporting Green over and over with absolutely no desire to get out of my seat and do anything. The box score in my head always read: *World 1, Miles 0*."

Then I read his last entry:

"I often think about the long plane trip back to the U.S.A. Should I have stayed and died in Vietnam? Would I be better off? I lost everything back home. That I could live with. Losing myself — that I cannot live with."

I closed the cigar box and stared at it for a long, long time.

Art by San Francisco Print Collective

On Filling A New National Cemetery

by Claire J. Baker

They unload the trucks of
newly-numbered dead
who fight in wars that bring no end to war.
They plant them side by side and foot to head
these heroes for a nation to adore.
This country lad, too young, deserves a tree
above him—rare in graveyards needing space
where stone on stone on empty stone will be
granite symbols sun and wind will trace.

We walk the hallowed ground in search of one,
our own who died, and then we see them all
alive and loving, singing in the sun,
a rock band playing — not a bugle call.

Each month the trucks arrive
(the dead have tears).
All the graves are filled in these short years.